

undisputed dominion of El in the days of his great power, and the remembrance of that causes his sons to tremble. El has given the princesses to his sons, and they know that he is able to take them away from them. Yet, although the curse of El is feared, we never find that El curses anybody, but very often he blesses.

In the sacrificial lists El, as the father of the gods, is always mentioned at the head of all other gods, even before Ba'al, and he receives many offerings.<sup>1</sup>

The actions of El and of other gods reveal that El is no more the actual king of the gods at Ugarit at the time from which the bulk of Ugaritic myths come. He completely lacks virility and power and is not feared by gods outside of his own family. His wisdom and his potent ability for declaring decrees and for giving blessings is indispensable. Furthermore, El as the author and maintainer of moral and social order remains the highest authority in the social realm, and accordingly dominates in the royal cult.<sup>2</sup> (See footnote!)<sup>3</sup>

#### Asherah 4.5

As the wife of El, Asherah was called Elat ('*il*);<sup>4</sup> it is by that name that she is mentioned in the early myths, as well as in the later sacrificial texts and in proper names.<sup>5</sup> That she was the first wife of the king of the gods reveals her unique importance as a goddess. The fact that she was called "Creatress of the Gods" and gave birth to seventy gods, among whom are such old Canaanite

<sup>1</sup> *UM* 1: 2, 6; 9: 3, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the stele described *supra*, pp. 21-22 and El's dominant role in the legend of *Krt*, as he cares for the dynasty. In the sacrificial lists mentioning El first, the king plays a part, and none of them is connected with the great feast of the fertility cult.

<sup>3</sup> The red thread of conflict appears again on page 103 and continues from thereon. But before we throw ourselves into the heat of the battle, we must take a good look at the other *dramatis personae* and see where they come from, else we will not understand the motivation for their fighting.

<sup>4</sup> Ugaritic '*il*' may be etymologically related to Phoenician *il* in the inscription from M'sab where it seems to mean "sanctuary." Akkadian *asirru* also means "sanctuary." The name '*il*' may also mean "sanctuary" or perhaps "holiness," like *gudu*, another appellation of the goddess. Cf. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* ("The Ayer Lectures of the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, 1941"; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 78, n. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the study of Asherah by W. L. Reed, *The Asherah in the Old Testament* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1949).

<sup>6</sup> *UM* 49: 1: 12 *et al.*

<sup>7</sup> *UM* 1: 11 *ill mgl*; '*il* *asru* 80: 1: 19 *bn 'il*.

gods as Yamm and Mot, shows that she belonged to the original Canaanite pantheon, just like her husband, El.

We have already seen how she was united with El in the "sacred marriage" in the old myth, *Birth of the Gods*. As the great mother-goddess, she gave birth to the gods who gave fertility, thereby becoming a fertility goddess herself.

It is strange, however, to notice that it is only in the *Birth of the Gods* that both El and Asherah provide fertility by the "sacred marriage." In none of the other myths is her fertility function further described, but seems instead to have been taken over, to a large extent, by Ba'al's young sister, Anat. In the sacrificial lists, she is mentioned only a few times and receives only small offerings. How can this great decline in the function of this originally extremely important mother-goddess be explained? Might it have to do with the receding of her husband from his active rule over the pantheon?

In the Ba'al-Anat cycle alone Asherah is frequently called "the Lady Asherah of the Sea" (*ybt 'il* *yml*),<sup>1</sup> and she is described as active on the sea-shore. There she also gives orders to her servant Qdš w 'Amry, who is called "the Fisherman of Lady Asherah of the Sea," to cast a net into the sea.<sup>2</sup> Apparently she is the special goddess of fishing in the sea and rivers.

In the legend of *Krt* it is written, "They reach the sanctuary of Asherah of the Tyrians, even that of Elat of the Sidonians. There *Krt*, the Noble vows, 'As Asherah of the Tyrians exists, even Elat of the Sidonians . . .'"<sup>3</sup> This parallel shows us that Elat of Sidon is Asherah, and the fact that she is called so is evidence of her importance in Sidon and Tyre, perhaps as goddess of the sea.

Evidence of the cult of Asherah is the proper name of the ruler of Amurru, Abdi-Asirta, meaning "servant of Asherah," mentioned in the Tell el Amarna letters.<sup>4</sup> In a tablet discovered at Tell Ta'anach in Palestine the oracle of Asherah is mentioned as being of decisive political importance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *UM* 49: 1: 16, 17, 19, 25 *et al.*

<sup>2</sup> *UM* 51: 11. <sup>3</sup> *UM* Krt: 197-202.

<sup>4</sup> *Eat*, I, No. 60, 1: 2; II, p. 882.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Hrozný, "Keilschrifttexte von Ta'anek" in Ernst Sellin, *Tell Ta'anek* ("Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse," Vol. L, Part IV; Wien: In Kommission bei Alfred Hölder, 1904), pp. 113 ff. W. F. Albright, "A Prince of Ta'anach in the Fifteenth Century B.C.," *BASOR*, No. 94 (April, 1924), pp. 16-20.

Excerpts from  
El and His Family



In the Hebrew Bible, Asherah is described as an important Canaanite fertility goddess. She was represented by an object of wood, perhaps a stylized tree of life, whereby the goddess was invoked to provide fertility. Such symbols of Asherah were erected beside the altars of Ba'al; Gideon's father had one upon his high place for Ba'al,<sup>1</sup> and Ahab made the "Asherah" in Samaria where he built a temple with an altar to Ba'al and supported the numerous prophets of Ba'al and Asherah at his court.<sup>2</sup> Maacah, the mother of king Asa, made a similar idol for Asherah,<sup>3</sup> and king Manasseh set a graven image of Asherah in the temple of Yahweh.<sup>4</sup> Against any attempt to associate Asherah with the worship of Yahweh, the prophets of Yahweh earnestly warned his people, saying: "Thou shalt not plant thyself an Asherah of any (wood) near unto the altar of Yahweh, / neither shalt thou set thee up a statue, which Yahweh thy God hateth."<sup>5</sup>

It is undoubtedly the united cult of Ba'al and Asherah which the Hebrew prophet denounces with the words:

Upon a lofty and high mountain you have set your bed: even thither did you go up to offer sacrifice. Behind the doors also and the posts you have set up your remembrance: for apart from me, you have uncovered yourself, and have gone up; you have enlarged your bed, and have made agreement with them; you loved their bed, you saw [their] "hand."<sup>6</sup>

This is actually a description of the "sacred marriage," whereby Ba'al and Asherah, his consort, were believed to provide fertility. This may have been enacted by sexual intercourse between a priest of Ba'al and a priestess of Asherah.

How this detestable cult with its male prostitutes intruded into the very sanctuary of Yahweh, we learn from the description of Josiah who "broke down the houses of the sodomites, which were in the house of Yahweh, where the women wove houses for the Asherah."<sup>7</sup>

Thus the importance of Asherah as a fertility goddess depended upon her association with a male god, with whom she was united in the "sacred marriage." She was first the wife of the great creator

<sup>1</sup> Jud. 6: 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> 1. Ki. 16: 33; 18: 19.

<sup>3</sup> 1. Ki. 15: 13.

<sup>4</sup> 2. Ki. 21: 7.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 16: 21-22; 12: 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Is. 57: 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> 2. Ki. 23: 7.

god, El, and later became the consort of Ba'al; but, in vain did Lady Asherah try to win the favor of Yahweh, who by his prophets' condemned her as the great sorceress and harlot.<sup>1</sup>

From our study of the goddess Asherah in Canaan, especially at Ugarit, we have come to the conclusion that she, as the wife of the great creator god and mother of the original Canaanite pantheon, must be indigenous to Semitic Canaan. It is, therefore, surprising to find her in South Arabia as the consort of the extremely important moon god, Wadd. Her name occurs in three Qatabanian dedicatory texts in which there seems to be a reference to the temple of Wadd and Alhira.<sup>2</sup> Whereas it is impossible to imagine how the cult of the important Canaanite fertility goddess should have moved down through the large desert to South Arabia, it seems more likely that South Arabia was her original home. From there, the first Semites, as they moved up through the Arabian desert to settle in Canaan, may have brought their great mother goddess with them. In the fertile Canaan, Asherah may early have developed her function of fertility goddess.

The cult of Asherah also spread to other parts of the Semitic world. She is mentioned in a list of gods from Nippur from the Isin-Larsa period.<sup>3</sup> A Babylonian temple was dedicated to her.<sup>4</sup> Her association with important West Semitic gods is interesting. She appears in the Old Babylonian period, both as the consort of *Ra-ma-a-nu-um*, who is Hadad,<sup>5</sup> and as the consort of Amurru, being called "the Mistress of the Plain."<sup>6</sup> In an Aramaic incantation found at Arslan Tash in Upper Syria, Asherah seems to be invoked to assist women in childbirth.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Is. 57: 3.

<sup>2</sup> F. Hommel, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen*, Part II (München: Verlag von Hermann Luitke, 1900), pp. 157, 206 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Chiera, *Sumerian Lexical Texts from the Temple School of Nippur* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929), No. 122: V: 17; No. 124: VII: 21.

<sup>4</sup> Th. G. Pinches, "The Temples of Ancient Babylonia I," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, XXII (December, 1900), 359.

<sup>5</sup> A. H. Sayce, "Babylonian Cylinders in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg," *ZA*, VI (1891), 161-63.

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Reisner (ed.), *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln Griechischer Zeit* (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1896), No. 139: 142-45. F. Hommel, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen*, Part II (München: Verlag von Hermann Luitke, 1900), p. 210.

<sup>7</sup> W. F. Albright, "An Aramaean Magical Text in Hebrew from the Seventh Century B.C.," *BASOR*, No. 76 (December, 1939), pp. 5-11.



exclaim, "Ba'al is dead! What becomes of the people?/ Dagan's son! What of the multitudes?"<sup>1</sup> Also, they need a substitute for Ba'al. When El sends a message to Špš that she shall seek Ba'al, he states, "Parched are the furrows of the fields, O Špš/ parched are the furrows of the fields of El. Ba'al neglects the furrows of the ploughed land."<sup>2</sup>

Môt is the god of death and sterility and, by his power, keeps Ba'al back. The whole of nature is under Môt's ban. Not until 'Anat, after having required Ba'al to yield, kills Môt, is Ba'al set free. Here, Môt is treated like reaped grain.<sup>3</sup>

By killing Môt 'Anat secures the unlimited rule of Ba'al for the next cycle of seven years. But after the seven years have elapsed Môt appears again,<sup>4</sup> and is engaged in a fierce battle with Ba'al, but has to give up the struggle by the threat of Špš whereby the continued rule of Ba'al is secured. This shows us how after the lean years the seven rich and fertile years can follow.<sup>5</sup>

Probably because Môt was considered an adversary to fertility

<sup>1</sup> *UM* 67: VI: 23-24; 62: 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> *UM* 49: IV: 25-27.

<sup>3</sup> F. Lohkegaard in "A Plea for El, the Bull, and other Ugaritic Miscellanies," *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen septuagenario dicata* (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1953), p. 231, gives this explanation: "The seed-corn, hard and stony before sowing, is kept in the bowels of the earth, stowed away in jars. Like Hades (Pluto) Môt is the master of the stored corn, the God of Dives. Thus the mowed corn belongs to Môt, while the growing corn belongs under the dominion of Baal. The transition from the hard corn to the new germs is a miracle, and it means that the corn goes over from the realm of death to the realm of life. Primitive man does not think about the identity of things like moderns."

<sup>4</sup> *UM* 49: V: 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Originally, when El was the prime god in the fertility cult, as seen in the *Birth of the Gods*, the natural cycle was seven years long (cf. *UM* 52: 66-67). This order was still kept by the El worshipping Hebrews. Yet, although El provided fertility, he never came to be identified with fertility or rain in any way like Ba'al, so as to become a dying and arising god. When Ba'al became the most prominent god in the fertility cult, his death and resurrection was adjusted to the old seven years pattern. This is proven by the texts *UM* 75: II: 45-46, where Ba'al was dead for seven years, and by *UM* 49: V: 7-9, where Môt, seven years after he had been killed by 'Anat, was alive again and engaged in a fierce combat with Ba'al upon Mount Šapân. Yet the death and resurrection of the rain god fitted much better to the yearly cycle of seasons in Canaan, where no rain fell during the dry summer, in contrast to the autumn and winter. Thus it probably came that later in Phoenicia the death and resurrection of the fertility god (cf. Adonis) was celebrated regularly every year.

no sacrifice is mentioned to him in the sacrificial lists. The Canaanites rather sacrificed to Ba'al so that by his power Môt might be defeated.

'Altr — 'Altr' 1 *špš* *špš*

Another son of El and Asherah is 'Altr.<sup>2</sup> This god, like his mother, Asherah, is also represented in the South Arabic pantheon, where his importance is much greater than it ever was at Ugarit. Since we again have to assume that South Arabia, rather than Canaan, was the original home of his cult, from where it, however, must have spread very early, we shall first consider him there.

In South Arabia the male god 'Altr was the star Venus, the chief god of the South Arabic pantheon. He has the epithet "the Eastern One" (*Šariqân*), which characterizes him as the Morning-star. Other epithets of 'Altr are "the Bellicose," "Lord of Strength," "the Mighty One." He is the giver of rain in autumn and spring which fills the wadies,<sup>3</sup> and he is also the god of irrigation.<sup>4</sup> The evidence from South Arabia is of great importance, probably showing the original character and gender of 'Altr. However, even in South Arabia 'Altr was not always a masculine deity. 'Ummu-'Altr, i.e., "Mother 'Altr," was the Goddess of vegetation and human fecundity.<sup>5</sup>

In the Pre-Sargonic period, the Semitic 'Altr had already come to Mesopotamia, where his name was pronounced *Ištar*. The form of the name is grammatically masculine, and three old inscriptions from Mari designate Ištar as male;<sup>6</sup> moreover, sometimes Ištar is

<sup>1</sup> Studies of 'Altr, Ištar: J. Bottéro, M. J. Dahood, W. Caskel, *Le antiche divinità semitiche*, ed. S. Moscati (Roma: Centro di Studi semitici, 1958), pp. 40-41, 85-90, 100-106, John Gray, "The Desert God 'Altr in the Literature and Religion of Canaan," *JNES*, VIII, No. 2 (April, 1949), 72-83. André Caquot, "Le Dieu 'Athtar et les textes de Ras Shamra," *Syria*, XXXV (1958), 45-60.

<sup>2</sup> *UM* 129: 17; 49: I: 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Höfner, "Šidarabien" in Haussig(ed), *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, I. Abteilung, Teil I, p. 498.

<sup>4</sup> G. Rychmans suggests, in *Les religions arabes préislamiques* (2d ed., "Bibliothèque du musée," Vol. XXVI; Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1951), pp. 41, 62, that the name 'Altr comes from the root represented in Arabic *š*, to irrigate; cf. Arabic *šarīf*, "irrigated land."

<sup>5</sup> J. and H. Derenbourg, "Études sur l'épigraphie du Yémen," *Journal asiatique*, 8. série, II (August-September, 1883), 257-61.

<sup>6</sup> F. Thureau-Dangin, "Inscriptions votives sur des statuettes de Mari," *RA*, XXXI (1934), 141.



represented with a beard. Also the name of a king of Kish at the time of Sargon of Agade *Eš-dar-mu-ti*, "Ištar is my husband," reveals the masculinity of Ištar.<sup>1</sup>

Since Ištar, however, was identified with the prominent Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Venus star (Sumerian *DIL-BAT*), Ištar too became considered a goddess in Babylonia. There the Morning-star is called the "male Venus" and the Evening-star the "female Venus"; but in both aspects Ištar is always a goddess in Babylonian mythology. The goddess herself sings of the double aspect of her nature: "Ištar, goddess of evening, I am she; Ištar, goddess of morning, I am she."<sup>2</sup> As the Morning-star she was the goddess of war and as the Evening-star she was the goddess of love and harlotry.

As goddess of war Ištar was called "the valiant daughter of Sin [the Moon-god]," and Hammurapi describes her as "the Lady of battle and conflict, who bares my weapons," and he invokes her against the violators of his law:

May she shatter his weapons in the field of battle and conflict; may she create confusion [and] revolt for him! May she strike down his warriors [and] water the earth with their blood! May she throw up a heap of his warriors' bodies on the plain; may she show his warriors no mercy.<sup>3</sup>

As goddess of war the militant Assyrians exalted Ištar, and thus she is described as marching before the army of Tukulti-Ninurta I in his triumph over Kaštiliaš, the king of Babylon.<sup>4</sup> On monuments the armed Ištar is represented with her animal, the lion. In the religious literature she is described as a furious lion.<sup>5</sup>

As goddess of love Ištar plays an important role in Sumerian-Akkadian mythology. When Ištar descends into the nether-world all sexual life ceases among men and animals. She was the most important goddess in the Sumerian-Akkadian pantheon. It was

<sup>1</sup> Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (2d ed., "Assyriological Studies," No. 11; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 108-109, 168.

<sup>2</sup> P. Dhorme, *Choix de textes religieux assyro-babyloniens* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1907), pp. 366-69.

<sup>3</sup> *CH*, Epilogue, XXVII: 92-XXVIII: 23. *ANET*, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> *AR*, p. 51, No. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Tallqvist, pp. 116, 139.

Ištar who drew Sargon of Agade by her love and elevated him to the kingship. The kings of Isin were the beloved husbands of Ištar. It is "she who gives the scepter, the throne, the years of reign to all the kings."<sup>1</sup>

The principal deity of the Arabs of the country of Adumatu conquered by Išarhaddon bears the name *A-lar-sa-na-a-in*, "*Altr* of Heaven."<sup>2</sup> In the cuneiform texts from the Ḫabur region we meet theophorous names with *Altr* as the divine element.<sup>3</sup>

'*Altr* must also have arrived at Ugarit at a very early date, probably with the first Semitic invaders. There he became two distinct divinities, the male '*Altr*, probably the Morning-star, and the goddess '*Altr*, probably the Evening-star. The androgynous nature of '*Altr* is shown by two personal names (*Altr*<sup>3</sup>*ab*, "'*Altr* is father,"<sup>4</sup> and '*Altr*<sup>2</sup>*um*, "'*Altr* is mother."<sup>5</sup>

'*Altr* is called "the Terror-striking" (*'ariz*)<sup>6</sup> and is perhaps described as a lion in the Ugaritic poem of Nikkal, in which celestial deities play an important role.<sup>7</sup> When a palace has been granted by El to Yamn, '*Altr* is jealous and wants to ask his father for a similar palace. Špš, however, assures him that El will refuse his request and take from him his kingship. He has no wife,<sup>8</sup> probably because of his androgynous nature. This shows that he has a dominion, but is ambitious for more might.

When Ba'al has been killed, Asherah suggests her son '*Altr* as Ba'al's successor.<sup>9</sup> As he is not able to fill Ba'al's position, however, he has to descend from his throne and "reign upon the earth, as god of all of it."<sup>10</sup> A Ugaritic parallel reads thus: "The dew that

<sup>1</sup> Tallqvist, pp. 137-38.

<sup>2</sup> *ANET*, pp. 291, 299.

<sup>3</sup> J. Levy, "The Late Assyro-Babylonian Cult of the Moon and its Culmination at the Time of Nabonidus," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XIX (1945-46), 421-25.

<sup>4</sup> *PRU*, II, No. 46: 12.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Virolleaud, "Les nouvelles tablettes alphabétiques de Ras Shamra," *CRAIBL*, 1955, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> *UM* 49: 1: 26ff.

<sup>7</sup> *UM* 77: 28, 30.

<sup>8</sup> *UM* 129: 22.

<sup>9</sup> *UM* 49: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ugaritic *ymn*h b'arš yf h'lh (*UM* 49: 1: 37). H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," *ANET*, p. 140, translates "reigns in El's earth, all of it." Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*, p. 44, translates "that he may rule in all the gods earth." We, however, prefer the translation above, after comparing it with a similar phrase in *UM* 2 Aqht: V: 21, 31.

the heavens pour out/ the rain that the stars pour out."<sup>1</sup> The rain or dew which the stars pour out may be the dew which falls in nature just before dawn, when the morning star arises. Thus the gods may have turned to the morning star, 'Altr, to give rain like the Rider of the Clouds, Ba'al.<sup>2</sup> 'Altr, however, was not able to compensate for Ba'al's rain, but had rather to descend from Ba'al's exalted throne and assume his inferior function of giving dew to the earth. Later, when Ba'al is revived and mounts his clouds again, pouring out rain so that the valleys flowed with water, he smites 'Altr, his rival, and takes over the reign over the earth.

How 'Altr covets the kingship over the pantheon, but comes to a miserable end, is described thus:

How art thou fallen from Heaven, Morning-star, son of Dawn!  
Thou art cut to the ground, that didst prostrate the nations! And  
thou that didst say in thy heart, I will ascend into the heavens, I  
will exalt my throne above the stars of El, and I will sit upon the  
mount of assembly, in the recesses of Saphôn; I will mount up upon  
the heights of the clouds, I will be like 'Elyôn: none the less art  
thou brought down to Sheol,<sup>3</sup> to the recesses of the pit.<sup>4</sup>

In the early mythological texts, 'Altr plays a more important part than his sister, 'Altr, who is mentioned only rarely. The fact, however, that 'Altr is not mentioned in the later sacrificial lists at Ugarit, may indicate that in later times he is supplanted by his counterpart, the important fertility goddess 'Altr, whose function, as she is associated with Ba'al, is considered more important.

'Altr is a goddess in the Ugaritic pantheon, whose beauty can only be compared with 'Anat's. When Lady Hry, Krt's noble bride, is described, her "loveliness is like 'Anat's loveliness/ her beauty is like 'Altr's beauty."<sup>5</sup> Her strength is seen when she and another goddess are able to hold back the enraged Ba'al from smiting the messengers of Yamm.<sup>6</sup> On one occasion she even rebukes Ba'al for having killed Yamm, wherefore Ba'al is greatly ashamed.<sup>7</sup> Her name is called upon in a terrible curse which is

<sup>1</sup> *UM* int: II: 40-41, IV: 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the above mentioned function of 'Altr in South Arabia, where he was believed to give rain.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *stipra*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Is. 14: 12-15.

<sup>5</sup> *UM* Krt: 146.

<sup>6</sup> *UM* 137: 40.

<sup>7</sup> *UM* 68: 28-31.

uttered twice, once by Ba'al against Yamm and once by Krt against his son Ysb, when he wants to usurp his father's throne: "May Horon break thy head/ 'Altr šm Ba'al! thy pate!"<sup>1</sup> The same name ('Altr šm Ba'al) occurs in the Phoenician inscription of Eshmunazar.<sup>2</sup> The use of the name in curses, paralleled with Horon, who is the god of the underworld who can inflict damage and plagues, shows its terrible connotation. Since 'Altr was, among the Arabs, called *A-tar-sa-ma-a-in*, "Altr of Heaven," 'Altr in Canaan may have had the same epithet, for which the divine name 'Altr šm Ba'al should perhaps be translated "'Altr-of-Heaven of Ba'al," as Virolleaud first proposed. This name shows that 'Altr has become the consort of Ba'al, as is also seen from Phoenician religion and from the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> The fact that 'Altr in early times is opposed to Ba'al, but later is found associated with him in their prevalent fertility cult in Canaan, shows that Ba'al, overcoming her resistance, takes her as his wife.<sup>4</sup>

The association of 'Altr with Ba'al is also seen from the *Phoenician History*, which states:

But Astarte the greatest,<sup>5</sup> and Zeus Demarís [=Ba'al-Hadad] and Adodos [=Adad], the king of the gods, ruled over the country with the consent of Kronos. And Astarte put upon her own head, as sign of kingship, the head of a bull. And travelling around the world she found a star fallen from the air, and having taken it up, she consecrated it in Tyre, the holy island. And the Phoenicians say that Astarte is Aphrodite.<sup>6</sup>

Here her association with the stars is expressed. Also, we recognize her dominant importance in Phoenicia. She is the daughter of Uranos and the consort of El-Kronos,<sup>7</sup> with whom she has two sons Desire and Love,<sup>8</sup> showing her nature as the goddess of Love.

<sup>1</sup> Virolleaud suggests the meaning "'Altr of the heavens of Ba'al" (Ch. Virolleaud, "Le roi Kéret et son fils," *Syria*, XXXIII [1924-25], 17-18).

Ginsberg and Gordon translate the name "'Altr-Name-of-Ba'al" (H. L. Ginsberg, The Legend of King Kéret ["BASOR, Supplementary Studies," Nos. 2-3, 1946], p. 49; Gordon, *UM: Glossary*, No. 1841).

<sup>2</sup> *UM* 137: 7-8; 127: 54-57.

<sup>3</sup> *CIS*, I, No. 3, l. 18; Cooke, pp. 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> *Jud.* 2: 13; 10: 6; 1. Sam. 7: 4; 12: 10.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the same behavior by El in the *Phoenician History*.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps a translation of Canaanite Phoenician 𐤀𐤋𐤏, "Lady."

<sup>7</sup> *PE* i. 10. 24.

<sup>8</sup> *PE* i. 10. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *PE* i. 10. 20.



In the Bible, it is stated repeatedly that the Israelites forsook Yahweh and served Ba'al and Astarte (Hebrew *ḥṭṭṭ*).<sup>1</sup> This shows that they functioned together through the "sacred marriage." The Hebrew expression *ḥṭṭ ḥṭṭ*, meaning "increase of small cattle" (or "ewes" as propagating the flock),<sup>2</sup> gives a hint of the function of the goddess as causing animal fecundity. The name of a city in Bashan, 'Ashtaroth Qarnajim, shows that the goddess had two horns, and this agrees with representations of her.<sup>3</sup>

On the Moabite Stone of the ninth century B.C., Mesha, the king of Moab, records how he conquered the cities of 'Astaroth and Nebo and devoted their inhabitants to destruction for the deity 'Ashtar-Chemosh, probably an hypostasis of 'Altr.<sup>4</sup> Here, on the border of the great desert, 'Altr appears to be male; we see, also, the terrible nature of this god to whom human beings were sacrificed.

From our study of 'Altr, we thus notice that the male 'Altr prevails in desert regions, whereas the feminine gender becomes prevalent in fertile regions. This explains why the male 'Altr did not become so important at Ugarit as in South Arabia. The fact, however, that the male gender of the Semitic 'Altr was, in the earliest times, the more important of the two, both at Ugarit and in Mesopotamia, though later being suppressed there by the feminine sex, reveals the ultimate desert origin of this deity.

From this study of El and his family we arrive at the following conclusions. El is described as the oldest god at Ugarit and as the creator of the universe. With his wife Asherah he gave birth to a large family, of which Yamm and Môt appear to be very old and

<sup>1</sup> Vocalized like *ḥṭṭ*, "shame." The Septuagint Greek version has 'Aστάρη; Jud. 2: 13; 10: 6; *et al.* In the Hebrew Bible the plural form of the divine name is often used to indicate the totality of manifestations of the deity.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 7: 13 *et al.*

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 14: 5; Deut. 1: 4. Cf. the description of Astarte in the *Phoenician History*, where she put upon her head the head of a bull (*PE* i, 10, 24). At Gezer a figure of Astarte with cowhorns was found; cf. R. A. S. Macalister, "Fourth Quarterly Report of the Excavation of Gezer," *PEQ*, 1903, pp. 227ff. Pl. iv, Fig. 12. In the temple of Amenhotep III at Beth-shan (level VII) was found a stela doubtless representing "Astoreth of the two Horns." On the head of the goddess is the conical crown common to Syrian deities, with two horns below, and a streamer attached to the back. Alan Rowe, *The Topography and History of Beth-Shan* ("Publication of the Palestine Section of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania"; Philadelphia: University Press, 1930), pp. 19, 21; pl. xlviii, No. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *The Moabite Stone*, l. 17. Cf. Cooke, pp. 1, 12; *ANET*, p. 320.

native gods of Canaan. 'Altr, who like Asherah is attested as an important god in the South Arabic pantheon, may be as old in Canaan as the Semites there. Thus El and his family constitute the original, indigenous Canaanite pantheon.

To these members of his family, El has given different dominions over the universe, and they seem to have taken care of all divine functions, of which the most important to the Canaanites was that of providing fertility.